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AUTOR Davis, Stephen F.
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ABSTRACT

Benefits of attending research conferences for the master's-level graduate student are described. The following goals and benefits cited by Carsrud et al. (1982) are applied to the graduate student: (1) incentive for students to undertake independent research, the results of which will be reported at a convention; (2) communication with others (faculty and students) about one's own research; (3) citing the conference presentation on student's vita; and (4) using the conference presentation experience to improve speaking skills. Based on undergraduate/graduate student conventions in Kansas over the past 4 years, information is provided on: the number of undergraduate and graduate student papers by research or nonresearch category, total number of student authors by category, and the total number of colleges and universities that have been represented each year. The data indicate that the total number of papers has grown steadily each year. Generally, the greatest growth appears to be in the graduate categories, especially in the area of graduate nonresearch papers. Only seven papers (6 percent) over the past 4 years have come from students attending large state universities. Some evidence suggests that the student-convention experience contributes to professional growth. (SW)

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Research Conferences, Professional Development
and the Graduate Student

Stephen F. Davis
Department of Psychology
Emporia State University
Emporia, Kansas 66801

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Paper presented at the 92nd Annual Convention of the American
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Research Conferences, Professional Development,
and the Graduate Student

The title of this symposium, "The Role of conferences in the Teaching of Psychology," would appear to be an appropriate starting point for my comments on "Research Conferences, Professional Development, and the Graduate Student. One benefit of such conferences that quickly comes to mind is the acquisition of new knowledge. Certainly, this is an aspect of the convention or conference that cannot be disputed. However, I have chosen to restrict my comments to the "teaching of psychology" dimension, rather than discussing the value or values to be gained through the dissemination of new research findings and information. After all, teaching is what this symposium, the division sponsoring this session, and even a journal published by this division are all about.

Certainly we are, or should be, striving for some educational goal or goals when a student conference or convention is held. With regard to undergraduate research conferences, Carsrud, Palladino, Tanke, Aubrecht, and Huber (1982) have cited several objectives. It is my contention that many of these "undergraduate" goals are also applicable to the graduate student, especially the master's-level graduate student. And perhaps this is the type and/or level of graduate student that my remarks are primarily directed toward. At this educational level the pressures, com-

petition, and commitment of time are perhaps not as intense or demanding as in a doctoral program. Hence, the master's-level graduate student may have more time or opportunities to learn from such student-convention experiences. But, what are some of these goals and benefits that Carsrud et al. (1982) cited, and how do they apply to the graduate student?

1. Incentive for students to undertake independent research, the results of which will be reported at a convention. This goal carries with it the acquisition of more sophisticated research skills. Few, if any, psychologists would argue with the potential benefits to be gained through acquiring new research skills by either graduate or undergraduate students. Further, it would seem that the degree of sophistication of such new research skills would only be enhanced by having conducted previous research projects which were presented at student conferences or conventions. Ideally, then, it would appear that we should start our students in these endeavors as soon as possible in order to obtain maximum benefit from this growth process.
2. Communication with others (faculty and students) about one's own research. For students at large institutions where there may be several faculty and/or students working in the same area this may not seem all that important. But, it is very important to those at the smaller schools. In this context it is interesting to

note that Carsrud et al. (1982) indicate that "Despite the assumption that these conferences would be hosted by doctoral degree granting institutions, the data indicated that conferences are typically hosted by small to medium sized institutions" Hence, student conventions would appear to serve this very important communication role for both undergraduate and graduate students at the smaller institutions.

3. It is further indicated that a presentation at a conference may later be translated into an entry on a vita. Such items, in turn, are typically viewed positively by a graduate-admissions committee. For the master's-level graduate student a consideration of this point would suggest that he or she is applying for further training at the doctoral level. Unfortunately, Annis, Tucker, and Baker answered the title of their 1978 paper, "What happens to Ph.D. program applicants who have master's degrees?" by clearly indicating that such applicants may be passed over in preference for good undergraduates. Hence, even the best master's level graduate students may actually find the admission procedure more difficult than they envisioned, or than it possibly should be. Convention presentation entries on a vita are clear indications to an admissions committee that this IS a student who has done more than simply go to class, take notes and tests, and go home.

4. Certainly, if your students have been prepared correctly, the entire process of making a convention presentation should help them considerably with their oral-presentation skills. Carsrud et al. (1982) indicate that such skills will be important or "helpful when applying for either admission to professional schools or jobs." I would add that developing the ability to make oral presentations is a general skill that is important for one's professional growth in the field of psychology. In this regard, student conventions may play a uniquely important role. To fully appreciate this role, I would ask you to remember the first paper you ever presented. For many of us this first presentation occurred at a major regional convention when we were graduate students. Again, for many of us it was, quite literally, a terrifying experience -- one that I would not like to relive anytime soon. We have all seen or personally experienced similar situations. Unfortunately, some graduate students, potentially excellent and productive scholars, never recover from such occurrences. If only that first, awkward paper had been delivered in a less threatening, more constructive environment! From my perspective, student conventions serve as that less-threatening, stepping-stone vehicle to the ability to make an excellent, polished presentation at a major convention.

Now, what I have presented up to this point might be characterized as "generic idealism," if one were inclined to be cynical; or, a little less harshly, simply dismissed as "that's nice." Let's see if we can't bring this whole presentation back to reality with some concrete examples.

For the past four years an annual students' convention has been held in the State of Kansas. As I was involved in the establishment of this convention, I am reasonably familiar with the specific trends that appear to have developed over the years. Two specific aspects may serve to distinguish this convention from others. First, both undergraduate and graduate paper sessions are presented at the same convention. Further, both graduates and undergraduates have the option of presenting papers in research and/or nonresearch categories of paper competition. In an attempt to give you a "feel" for the trends that have developed in our convention, I have summarized the number of papers by category, the total number of papers, the total number of student authors by category, and the total number of colleges and universities that have been represented each year in Table 1 in your handout. An examination of this

Insert Table 1 about here

table reveals several trends. First, the total number of papers presented each year has grown steadily. If one is willing to equate popularity with growth, then the convention is becoming more popular each year. This popularity is also reflected in a yearly increase in

the number of non-presenting participants. As can be seen from Table 1, the total number of student authors also has increased each year. Hence, more students are becoming involved in an increasing number of projects. It is interesting to note that multiple-author papers are typically restricted to the research categories. Table 1 also suggest that, generally speaking, the greatest growth would appear to have taken place in the graduate categories, especially in the area of graduate nonresearch papers.

Now, there are also some "not-so-obvious" trends that also deserve attention. First, in keeping with the observations of Carsrud et al. (1982) the Kansas convention has seen minimal participation from the large state universities. In fact, only 6% (7 papers) of the 115 papers that have been presented over the past four years have come from such schools. Further, only two of these were undergraduate papers. Returning to a consideration of graduate students, these data suggest that such conventions may be serving the interests and needs of the master's-level graduate student almost exclusively.

Table 1 clearly tells us that a total of 66 graduate papers have been presented at our convention over the past four years. It does not tell us that of the 61 papers presented by master's-level students 19 (31%) were by students who are currently enrolled in, or have subsequently completed, doctoral programs. Personally, I feel that this is an impressive figure. As the vast majority of these presentations represented "firsts" for the students involved, we would like to believe that this student-convention experience did help their professional growth. Informal conversations have emphatically underscored this contention. More concretely, two master's-level students whose first convention presentations were made at our Kansas Students'

Convention received consecutive first-place awards in graduate research competition at the Southwestern Psychological Association regional meeting. They were the only master's students entered in these competitions. A student, whose first paper was given at the Kansas Students' Convention as an undergraduate, won the APA/Psi Chi J.P. Guilford Research Award in 1983. She also received first place in the graduate research competition at the 1984 Kansas Students' Convention. This young lady is reflective of yet another trend I see developing. Namely, it would appear that a fair number of students who make their first convention presentation as undergraduates are continuing to return to the annual student's convention to make presentations as master's students. Over 16% of the students who made their first presentation as undergraduates have returned to make presentations as graduate students. This continuity has led to the development of an "apprenticeship" system where we see experienced graduate students directly assisting in the preparation of convention presentations by undergraduates. Another aspect that might be called an "apprenticeship" system is the observation that students who make their first presentation in nonresearch categories return to present in the research competition. Hence the research categories have been afforded increased prestige.

Hopefully, these examples have been sufficient to convince you that graduates students are growing and developing professionally as a result of their involvement with a convention or conference such as the one we hold in Kansas. Certainly, I would not

claim that the convention, per se, is THE cause for this growth, far from it. The research, paper preparation, and rehearsal are done at one's college or university under the guidance of a supportive faculty member. The convention simply provides students with a forum by which research data and papers may be shared with peers. However, without the impetus of a students' convention, one wonders just how much research would not have been conducted, how many papers would not have been presented, and how many graduate students would not have grown to such an extent professionally. Those of us in Kansas feel that our annual students' convention has made a significant contribution to the graduate education and professional growth of our students.

References

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Table 1
Kansas Students' Contributions To Psychology Convention And
Paper Competition: 1981-1984 Yearly Comparisons

	Undergraduate Nonresearch Papers *	Undergraduate Research Papers *	Graduate Nonresearch Papers *	Graduate Research Papers *	Total Number of Papers	Total Number of Colleges/Universities Represented
1981	2 (2)	7 (9)	0 (0)	10 (12)	19 (23)	8
1982	3 (3)	8 (12)	3 (3)	9 (21)	23 (39)	8
1983	9 (9)	10 (21)	4 (4)	6 (10)	29 (44)	9
1984	4 (4)	6 (7)	14 (15)	20 (28)	44 (54)	10
	18 (18)	31 (49)	21 (22)	45 (71)	115 (160)	

* The total number of student authors is shown in ().